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ABSTRACT

This booklet provides a basic introduction to the history, cultures, and resettlement experiences of the Montagnard people of Vietnam. It is designed primary for service providers and others assisting Montagnard refugees in their new communities in the United States. Information has been drawn from many sources, especially from insights provided by Montagnards who have resettled in North Carolina. Information is provided on the Montagnard people and where they came from, their daily life and values, their language and literacy, education, and cross-cultural challenges (e.g., driving, alcohol, housing, learning English, youth, work and finances). (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education) (Author/VWL)

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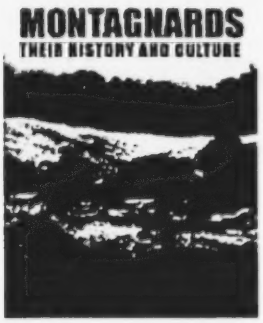


# Montagnards
## Their History and Culture

**Raleigh Bailey**

**Culture Profile**
**2002**

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# Table of Contents

1. Preface

2. Introduction

3. Land

4. People

3. Economy

5. History

6. Religion

7. Daily Life and Values
   a. Family Life and gender Roles
   b. Festivities
   c. Food and Dress
   d. Art, Literature, Music
   e. Names

8. Language and Literacy
   a. Language Use
   b. Literacy

9. Education
   a. Access, Policy, Practice
   b. Bantu's knowledge of English

10. Cross-cultural Challenges
   a. Driving
   b. Alcohol
   c. Housing
   d. Shortage of Women
   e. Work and Finances
   f. Health Care
   g. Mental Health
   h. Youth
   i. Learning English
   j. Early vs. Recent Arrivals

k. The Montagnard Experience in North Carolina

12. Bibliography

top

---

<< CHAPTER >>

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# Preface

This booklet is a basic introduction to the history, cultures, and resettlement experiences of the Montagnard people of Vietnam. It is designed primarily for service providers and others assisting Montagnard refugees in their new communities in the United States.

The principal writer is Raleigh Bailey, the founding director of the Center for New North Carolinians at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) and a senior research scientist in the Department of Social Work at UNCG. This is the author's 8th year as director of ACCESS (Accessing Cross Cultural Education Service Systems), a cluster of projects designed to help immigrant and refugee groups gain access to services and to improve communication and understanding between these groups and mainstream communities. From 1989 to 1993, he lived in Southeast Asia, first in Thailand where he administered a refugee training program through the Department of State, and then in Cambodia where he administered a U.S. government-funded prosthetics project for landmine victims. From 1984 to 1989, the author served as the director of Refugee Programs for Lutheran Family Services in the Carolinas. During that time, he directed the initial Montagnard resettlement project in the United States.

Information for this profile has been drawn from numerous sources. Information and insights provided by Montagnards who have resettled in North Carolina have been especially helpful. In particular, the author wants to acknowledge the contributions of Pierre K'Briuh, who served as the Montagnard project director for Lutheran Family Services in the late 1980s under the author's supervision, and Y Hin Nie who currently serves as a Montagnard community development worker under the author's supervision through the Center for New North Carolinians. Both men have had many other leadership roles in the Montagnard community in the United States and overseas. This profile has also profited from the perspectives of a group of Montagnard young people who have served their community through the AmeriCorps ACCESS Project over the last 7 years.

Additional acknowledgements are due to the staff of Lutheran Family Services, who have overseen much of the Montagnard resettlement in North Carolina, and to the staff from Catholic Social Services, who have also been involved with Montagnard resettlement. In particular, we would like to thank Pat Priest, director, and Janet Johnson, immigration specialist, of Lutheran Family Services in the Carolinas, for providing key information on statistics and other issues associated with the resettlement of the Montagnard population in North Carolina.

We would also like to express our appreciation to Donald A. Ranard for his thorough and timely editing assistance and to Vincent Sagart for his design expertise.

Finally, we would like to thank the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration of the U.S. Department of State, whose support made this profile possible.

top

<< CHAPTER >>

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# Introduction

***The hilltribes people from Vietnam known as the Montagnards first began coming to the United States in the 1986.***

The hilltribes people from Vietnam known as the Montagnards first began coming to the United States in the 1986. Although the Montagnards worked closely with the U.S. military in Vietnam, almost none of them joined the exodus of refugees fleeing South Vietnam after the fall of the South Vietnamese government in 1975.

In 1986, about 200 Montagnard refugees, mostly men, were resettled in the United States; most were resettled in North Carolina. Before this small influx, there were only an estimated 30 Montagnards scattered around the United States.

From 1986 to 2001, small numbers of Montagnards continued to come to the United States. Some came as refugees while others came through family reunification and the Orderly Departure Program. Most settled in North Carolina, and by 2000 the Montagnard population in that state had grown to around 3,000. While these refugees have faced considerable difficulties, most have adapted quite well.

In 2002, another 900 Montagnard refugees were resettled in North Carolina. These refugees bring with them troubled histories of persecution, and few have family or political ties with the established Montagnard communities in the United States. Not surprisingly, their resettlement is proving to be very difficult indeed.

This profile looks at the backgrounds of the Montagnard people in Vietnam. It also looks at their resettlement experiences in the United States and discuses specific areas of adjustment that have proven problematic for this population

top

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# Land

***The Montagnards in the United States are from the Central Highlands of Vietnam***

The Montagnards in the United States are from the Central Highlands of Vietnam area situated north of the Mekong delta and inland from the China Sea. The north the Highlands is formed by the formidable Troung Son mountain range.

Before the Vietnam War and the Vietnamese settlement of the Highlands, the are mostly virgin mountain forest, with both hardwood and pine trees, though areas v regularly cleared for planting. The highland weather is more moderate than that o intensely hot tropical lowland areas, and at the higher altitudes, the temperature c below freezing. The year is divided into two seasons, dry and wet, and the monso South China Sea can blow into the Highlands.

Before the war, mainstream Vietnamese remained close to the coast and the rich lands, and the Montagnards in the rugged hills and mountains ranging up to 1500 little contact with outside peoples. Their isolation ended in the mid-20th century into the area were built and the Highlands developed strategic military value duri The Cambodian side of the Highlands, also home to Montagnard tribes, is similar with dense jungle and has no established roads or modern communication system

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# The People

***The Montagnards, who are made up of different tribes, with many overlapping customs, social interactions, and language patterns, typically refer to themselves by their tribal names such as Jarai, Koho, Manong, and Rhade.***

The term *Montagnard* means "mountain people" in French and is a carryover from the French colonial period in Vietnam. The term is preferable to the derogatory Vietnamese term *moi*, meaning "savage." *Montagnard* is the term, typically shortened to *Yard*, used by U.S. military personnel in the Central Highlands during the Vietnam War. The Montagnards, who are made up of different tribes, with many overlapping customs, social interactions, and language patterns, typically refer to themselves by their tribal names such as Jarai, Koho, Manong, and Rhade. Since *Montagnard* is still the most commonly recognized term for these people, it is the term we use in this profile.

Many of the first group of Montagnard refugees in the United States adopted the term *Dega* as their name instead of *Montagnard* because of the latter's colonial associations. *Dega* comes from the Rhade language and refers to a creation myth in which the first two Montagnards were named *De* and *Ga*. One was of Mon-Khmer heritage and the other of Malayo-Polynesian heritage, and all Montagnards are descendants of these first people of the Highlands, according to the myth. In fact, Montagnard languages are traceable to the Mon-Khmer and Malayo-Polynesian groups.

A Rhade term was chosen because among the first group of Montagnard refugees in the United States the Rhade were in the majority, and their language had been the lingua franca among the resistance fighters. The initial Montagnard organization formed in the United States in 1987 selected the name Montagnard Dega Association in an effort to establish an identity that was inclusive, independent, and recognizable to the community at large. Some Montagnards in the United States, though certainly not all, continue to identify strongly with the term *Dega*.

The literature on hilltribes in northern Vietnam and Laos that relies on traditional French sources sometimes refers to these peoples as *Montagnard*. However, the Montagnards from the Central Highlands of Vietnam should not be confused with hilltribe groups in other regions. The Montagnards from the Central Highlands are ethnically distinct from the Hmong and other hilltribe groups from Laos and from hilltribes from northern Vietnam even though they have similar histories of involvement with the U.S. military during the war in Vietnam and Laos. The Montagnards are also distinct from other ethnic minorities in Vietnam, including the Cham, a Muslim minority, who populate parts of Vietnam and Cambodia, and the Nung, as well as other tribal groups from northern Vietnam. A couple hundred Nung have been resettled as refugees in North

Carolina and are developing an association with the Montagnards there though the traditions between the two vary significantly. Some Montagnard tribes have also resided in the jungles of Cambodia near the border of Vietnam's Central Highlands, the border having been drawn by the French during their occupation.

Before the Vietnam War, the population of the Central Highlands, estimated at between 1 and 1.5 million, was almost exclusively Montagnard. Today, the population is approximately 4 million, of whom about 1 million are Montagnard. Of these, between 229,000 to 400,000 are thought to follow evangelical Protestantism. An additional 150,000 to 200,000 are Roman Catholic. The 30 or so Montagnard tribes in the Central Highlands comprise more than six different ethnic groups drawn primarily from the Malayo-Polynesian and Mon Khmer language families. The main tribes, in order of size, are the Jarai (320,000), Rhade (258,000), Bahnar (181,000), Koho (122,000), Mnong (89,000), and Stieng (66,000). The Rhade and Mnong are also known as the Ed and the Bunong.

As the indigenous peoples of the Central Highlands, the Montagnards are completely different in their culture and language from the mainstream Vietnamese. The Vietnamese arrived much later into what is now Vietnam and came primarily from China in different migratory waves. Primarily lowland rice farmers in the south, the Vietnamese have been much more influenced by outsiders, trade, the French colonization, and industrialization than have the Montagnards. Most Vietnamese are Buddhists, belonging to varying strains of Mahayana Buddhism, although Roman Catholicism and a native religion known as Cao Dai also have large followings. Part of the Vietnamese population, especially in larger towns and cities, maintain Chinese traditions and language. The ethnic Chinese constitute the largest minority in Vietnam.

Physically, the Montagnards are darker skinned than the mainstream Vietnamese and do not have epicanthic folds around their eyes. In general, they are about the same size as the mainstream Vietnamese.

top

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<< CHAPTER >>

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# Economy

***Increasing population density has required other farming methods, and the Montagnards have lost control of ancestral lands.***

For those Montagnards growing upland rice, the traditional economy was based on swidden, or slash-and-burn, farming. A village community would clear a few acres in the jungle by cutting down or burning the forest and allowing the fodder to enrich the soil. Next the community would farm the area for 3 or 4 years, until the soil was depleted. Then the community would clear a new swath of land and repeat the process. A typical Montagnard village might rotate six or seven agricultural sites but would let most lie fallow for a few years while they farmed one or two until the soil needed to be replenished. Other villages were sedentary, particularly those that adopted wet rice farming. In addition to highland rice, crops included vegetables and fruits. Villagers raised buffalo, cows, pigs, and chickens and hunted game and gathered wild plants and herbs in the forest.

Slash-and-burn farming began to die out during the 1960s because of the war and other outside influences. After the war, the Vietnamese government began to lay claim to some of the lands for the resettlement of mainstream Vietnamese. Swidden farming has now all but ended in the Central Highlands. Increasing population density has required other farming methods, and the Montagnards have lost control of ancestral lands. Large-scale government-controlled farming schemes, with coffee being the major crop, have been implemented in the area. Tribal villagers survive with small garden plots, growing cash crops such as coffee when the market is favorable. Many seek jobs in the growing villages and towns. However, traditional discrimination against the Montagnards restricts employment for most.

top

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# History

***The Montagnards have a long history of tensions with the mainstream Vietnamese...***

## Relations with the Vietnamese and the U.S. Military

In the mid 1950s, the once-isolated Montagnards began experiencing more contact with outsiders after the Vietnamese government launched efforts to gain better control of the Central Highlands and, following the 1954 Geneva Convention, new ethnic minorities from North Vietnam moved into the area. As a result of these changes, Montagnard communities felt a need to strengthen some of their own social structures and to develop a more formal shared identity.

The Montagnards have a long history of tensions with the mainstream Vietnamese that is comparable to the tensions between American Indians and the mainstream population in the United States. While mainstream Vietnamese are themselves heterogeneous, they generally share a common language and culture and have developed and maintained the dominant social institutions of Vietnam. The Montagnards do not share that heritage nor do they have access to the country's dominant institutions. There have been conflicts between the two groups over many issues, including land ownership, language and cultural preservation, access to education and resources, and political representation. In 1958, the Montagnards launched a movement known as BAJARAKA (the name is made up of the first letters of prominent tribes) to unite the tribes against the Vietnamese. There was a related, well-organized political and (occasionally) military force within the Montagnard communities known by the French acronym, FULRO, or Forces United for the Liberation of Races Oppressed. FULRO's objectives included freedom, autonomy, land ownership, and a separate highland nation.

Despite a long of history of conflict between the Montagnards and the mainstream Vietnamese, it should be kept in mind that there are many instances of friendship and intermarriage and efforts to cooperate and correct injustices between the two groups. A mixed population of people is emerging with a bicultural, bilingual heritage and an interest in finding common ground and mutual acceptance between the two groups.

The 1960s saw contact between the Montagnards and another group of outsiders, the U.S. military, as American involvement in the Vietnam War escalated and the Central Highlands emerged as a strategically important area, in large part because it included the Ho Chi Minh trail, the North Vietnamese supply line for Viet Cong forces in the south. The U.S. military, particularly the army's Special Forces, developed base camps in

the area and recruited the Montagnards, who fought alongside American soldiers and became a major part of the U.S. military effort in the Highlands. Montagnard bravery and loyalty earned them the respect and friendship of the U.S. military forces as well as sympathy for the Montagnard struggle for independence.

top

<< CHAPTER >>

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# Religion

The traditional religion of the Montagnards is animism, characterized by a keen sensitivity to nature and a belief that spirits are present and active in the natural world. These spirits are both good and bad. Rituals, often involving the sacrifice and blood letting of animals, are practiced regularly to appease the spirits. While the Montagnards still practice animism in Vietnam, those in the United States are Christian and for the most part do not practice the traditional religion.

***Rituals, often involving the sacrifice and blood letting of animals, are practiced regularly to appease the spirits.***

Christianity was introduced to the Montagnards in Vietnam in the 1850s by French Catholic missionaries. Some Montagnards embraced Catholicism, incorporating aspects of animism into their system of worship.

By the 1930s, American Protestant missionaries were also active in the Highlands. The Christian and Missionary Alliance, an evangelical fundamentalist denomination, had a particularly strong presence. Through the work of the Summer Institutes of Linguistics, these highly committed missionaries learned various tribal languages, developed written alphabets, translated the Bible into the languages, and taught the Montagnards to read the Bible in their own languages. The Montagnards who were converted to Protestant Christianity were expected to make a full break from their animist traditions. The sacrifice of Jesus as the Christ and the ritual of communion became a substitute for animal sacrifice and blood rituals.

Mission schools and churches became important social institutions in the Highlands. Native pastors were locally trained and ordained. Montagnard Christians experienced a new sense of self-worth and empowerment, and the church became a strong influence in the Montagnard quest for political autonomy. Even though most Montagnard peoples did not claim church membership, the influence of the church was felt throughout the society. The U.S. military alliance during the Vietnam War reinforced the Montagnard linkage with the American Protestant missionary movement. The oppression of the church in the Highlands by the current Vietnamese regime is rooted in this dynamic.

## Religious Practice in the United States

***Churches are a primary social institution for the Montagnards in the United States.***

The vast majority of the Montagnard refugees in the United States are Christian. Most are Protestant though probably over one-third, or about 1,000 people, are Roman Catholic.

Churches are a primary social institution for the Montagnards in the United

States. In North Carolina, many native churches are active in Raleigh, Greensboro, and Charlotte, the three primary cities that have resettled the Montagnards, although English-speaking Montagnards who wish to be acculturated into the wider American society have joined mainstream churches. Catholic Montagnards generally attend a Vietnamese or an English-speaking church, while evangelical Protestants attend Montagnard or English-speaking churches. Greensboro has a Catholic Montagnard and Vietnamese congregation with a Vietnamese priest and a Montagnard deacon.

Among the Protestant churches, differences appear to be more political and linguistic than theological. Some churches prefer a tribal identity, others want a church that provides more support to the resistance movement in Vietnam, and still others seek a congregation that emphasizes inclusion and reconciliation and seeks to reduce differences and divisions.

Most Montagnard Christians embrace their religion as a singular force that has transformed their people, viewing it as a means not only of personal salvation but also of cultural preservation and dignity. There is a strong identification with the suffering of the ancient Israelites. The notion of the promised land-the covenanted community-and the belief that Jesus was sacrificed for them resonates with the Montagnards. Daily activities, however, may not differ that much from those of other low-income people and other new arrivals who are seeking to adapt to their new communities and become self sufficient.

top

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<< CHAPTER >>

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# Daily Life and Values

## Family and Gender Roles

In Vietnam, Montagnard families traditionally lived in tribal villages. Related kin or extended families of 10 to 20 people lived in longhouses that shared public space with some private family room areas. The Montagnards have duplicated this living arrangement in North Carolina, sharing housing for camaraderie and support and to reduce expenses.

In Vietnam, the government relocation program is currently tearing down traditional longhouses in the Central Highlands in an attempt to break down the kinship affinity and solidarity of the close knit communities. Public housing is being built and mainstream Vietnamese are being relocated onto traditional Montagnard lands.

***In the family unit, the man is responsible for affairs outside of the house while the woman manages domestic affairs.***

Kinship and family roles vary by tribe, but many of the tribes have matrilineal and matrilocal marriage patterns. When a man marries a woman, he joins her family, adopts her name, and moves into her family's village, usually into her mother's house. Traditionally, the woman's family arranges the marriage and the woman pays a groom price to his family. While marriage is often within the same tribe, marriage across tribal lines is quite acceptable, and the man and children adopt the identity of the wife's tribe. This serves to stabilize and further unify the various Montagnard tribes.

In the family unit, the man is responsible for affairs outside of the house while the woman manages domestic affairs. The man confers with village leaders about community and governmental affairs, farming and community development, and political issues. The woman is responsible for the family unit, finances, and child rearing. He is the hunter and the warrior; she is the cook and the childcare provider. Some family and farming chores are shared, and some are shared communally with others in the longhouse or village.

In the United States, adaptation to American culture and intermarriage with other ethnic groups are changing the Montagnard traditions. Men and women both work outside the home and share childcare according to work schedules. Because of the shortage of Montagnard women in the United States, many men live together in simulated family units. Exposure to other communities is leading more men to marry outside their tradition. Interethnic marriages create new patterns and roles that combine various

ethnic traditions within the context of working-class life in the United States. When intermarriages occur, the most common unions are with mainstream Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, and Black and White Americans.

## Festivities

While there are no major holidays or events celebrated by the Montagnard refugees in the United States, community gatherings and social affairs are common. Sometimes these functions are church related. In North Carolina, people regularly travel to and from the three primary resettlement cities to see one another. Vietnam veterans typically host a Montagnard weekend picnic in May, and the Montagnard Dega Association traditionally organizes a statewide celebration in September.

top

## Food and Dress

***Common vegetables include squash, cabbage, eggplant, beans, and hot peppers.***

The Montagnard diet traditionally centers around rice with vegetables and sliced barbecued beef when meat is available. Common vegetables include squash, cabbage, eggplant, beans, and hot peppers. Chicken, pork, and fish are quite acceptable, and the Montagnards are open to eating any type of game. Youth have adapted quickly to American fast food.

Traditional Montagnard dress is very colorful, handmade, and embroidered. It is still worn to cultural events and sold as a handicraft. However, most people wear the typical working-class clothes that their American coworkers wear. The children have naturally become interested in the clothing styles of their American peers.

top

## Art, Literature, and Music

***Montagnard stories are traditionally oral and passed on through families***

Colorful blankets woven on looms are a Montagnard tradition. They are traditionally small and multipurpose, serving as shawls, wraps, baby carriers, and wall hangings. Other crafts include basket making, ornamental dress, and various bamboo utensils. Ornamental longhouse trim and bamboo weavings are an important part of the Montagnard tradition. Animal skins and bones are common materials in artwork. Bronze friendship bracelets are also a well-known Montagnard tradition.

Montagnard stories are traditionally oral and passed on through families. Written literature is quite recent and influenced by the church. Some older Montagnard tales and legends have been published in Vietnamese and French, but many of the traditional myths, legends, and tales have not yet been recorded and published

Montagnard instruments include gongs, bamboo flutes, and stringed instruments.

There are many popular songs, and they are played not only to entertain but also to preserve traditions. They are often accompanied with folk dances that tell tales of survival and perseverance. top

## Names

Naming traditions vary by tribe and the degree of accommodation to other cultures. Some people may use a single name. In some tribes, male names are preceded with a long *e* sound, indicated in the written language by a capital *Y*. This is comparable to the English *Mr.* and is used in everyday language. Some women's names may be preceded by the sounds *ha* or *ka*, indicated by a capital *H* or *K*. Names may sometimes be stated in the traditional Asian way, with the family name first. Americans may experience confusion trying to distinguish between the given name, family name, tribal name, and gender prefix. top

<< CHAPTER >>

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# Language and Literacy

***Montagnard languages can be traced to the Mon-Khmer and the Malayo-Polynesian language groups.***

Montagnard languages can be traced to the Mon-Khmer and the Malayo-Polynesian language groups. The first group includes the Bahnar, Koho, and the Mnong (or Bunong); the second group includes the Jarai and the Rhade. Within each group, the different tribes share some common language characteristics, such as root words and language structure.

Montagnard languages are not tonal like Vietnamese and may sound a little less alien to the ear of the English speaker. Language structure is relatively simple. The written scripts use the Roman alphabet with some diacritic marks.

## Language Use

The first language of a Montagnard is that of his or her tribe. In areas with overlapping tribes or tribes with similar language patterns, people may be able to communicate across tribal languages without much difficulty. The government has outlawed the use of tribal languages in schools, and those who have had schooling can also speak some Vietnamese. Because there is now a large mainstream Vietnamese population in the Central Highlands, more Montagnards are learning Vietnamese, which is the language of government as well as commerce. However, many Montagnards have limited schooling and have lived in isolated conditions and, as a result, do not speak Vietnamese. A language preservation movement in the Highlands has also affected Vietnamese language use.

Older people (mainly men) who were involved with the U.S government during the war may speak some English. A few elderly people who were educated in French colonial times speak some French.

## Literacy

Although there is evidence of French-educated Montagnards developing a written script for the native language early in the 20th century, major efforts were begun in the 1940s by American evangelical Protestant missionaries to help tribes develop written languages to read the Bible, and before 1975 missionary Bible schools were active in the highlands. Conscientious Montagnard Protestants, in particular, are likely to be literate in their native languages. Montagnards who attended school in Vietnam may have a rudimentary Vietnamese reading ability.

top

<< CHAPTER >>

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# Education

***In Vietnam, Montagnard youth typically do not attend school beyond the sixth grade; third grade might be an average literacy level.***

In Vietnam, formal education for the Montagnards has been generally limited. Though levels of education vary widely, based on a person's experience in Vietnam, a fifth-grade education for male villagers is typical. Women may not have attended school at all, though some did. In Vietnam, Montagnard youth typically do not attend school beyond the sixth grade; third grade might be an average literacy level. Some exceptional youth may have had the opportunity to continue education through high school, and a few Montagnards have attended college.

## Knowledge of English

The first group of Montagnard arrivals in the United States included some who spoke English as a result of their work with the U.S. military. The same was true with the 1992 group and some of the reeducation camp detainees. Most of the 2002 arrivals, however, are village farmers without English language skills, though those who were active in churches in Vietnam may have acquired some English through their association with English-speaking missionaries.

top

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SCROLL TO:

Driving

Alcohol

Housing

Shortage of Women

Work and Finances

Health Care

Mental Health

Youth

Learning English

Early vs Recent Arrivals

The Montagnard Experience in North Carolina

# Resettlement Issues

Refugees' initial contact with Americans is often through sponsors and service providers who are typically very receptive to the newcomers and reflect middle-class standards and expectations. As the refugees settle into their new communities, they have more contact with working-class people in factories and neighborhoods. Here the refugees have to prove themselves.

The following briefly discusses some of the challenges and issues that the Montagnards have faced in their resettlement. Some of the problems result from a lack of understanding about U.S. culture and customs and can be dealt with fairly simply by sensitive, knowledgeable service providers. Other problems, however, are much more deeply rooted and not easily solved.

## Driving

Issues relating to driving are chronic and the result of a combination of low income, the lack of good public transportation, and ignorance about U.S. laws. Problems relate to drinking and driving, the lack of insurance, and expired licenses, tags, registration, and inspection stickers.

## Alcohol

***The current arrivals are facing more challenges because of the slow economy.***

Although evangelical churches oppose alcohol consumption, using traditional rice wine in celebrations is a common highly ritualized practice in the Highlands. Montagnard exposure to the U.S. military dispelled any taboos associated with drinking insofar as it related to Americans. Regular consumption of alcohol, mostly beer, is common practice for many Montagnards just as it is for their coworkers and neighbors. For some, it leads to alcohol abuse because of a possible chemical propensity toward addiction.

## Housing

Landlords and neighbors commonly complain that the Montagnards do not maintain their houses and yards in accordance with U.S. customs. For example, furniture may be placed in yards or meat left to dry outside.

## Shortage of Women

The shortage of women in the Montagnard community is an ongoing problem. It poses extraordinary challenges for the men because traditionally women are the family leaders and decision makers in many ways. Identity is traced through the wife, and the woman's family arranges the marriage. Many Montagnard men have to move outside of their ethnic group if they hope to establish families in the United States. Yet few are culturally able to make this adjustment.

## Work and Finances

Previous arrivals have gone directly to work upon resettlement and remained employed. Jobs have typically been factory and warehouse work, landscaping, maintenance, or other tasks that are physically challenging but require little English. Employers have been able to fill difficult and undesirable second- and third-shift jobs with Montagnards. Because of language difficulties, many Montagnards do not get promoted to higher-paying positions. Even though most try to study English, their many responsibilities at home and work and their lack of formal education make formal language study very difficult.

Within this context, people have done well because of their diligence. Some people work regular double shifts, or do exceptionally well at piece work jobs, and families have earned enough money to buy a house within the first 5 years of arrival.

The current arrivals are facing more challenges because of the slow economy. While it is reasonable to assume that they will have the same success as previous arrivals in factory jobs, resettlement agencies face significant barriers in helping them find work. Knowledgeable employers have been eager to hire Montagnards in appropriate positions, but there are not as many positions available now. top

## Health Care

In Vietnam, Montagnards traditionally enjoyed healthy lives when adequate food was available. But with the loss of traditional farm land and foods and the related poverty, there was a decline in nutritional health in the Highlands. There has always been a shortage of health care resources for the Montagnards, and the problem has increased since the end of the Vietnam War. War-related injuries and physical persecution have exacerbated heath problems. Problems with malaria, TB, and other tropical diseases have been common, and potential refugees are screened for these. Persons with contagious diseases may be delayed in resettlement and given special medical treatment.

Some Montagnards have been diagnosed with cancer. This is not known to be a traditional disease of the Central Highlands, and many refugees believe

that it is the result of government poisoning of village wells to weaken the population. Some Montagnards also speculate that cancers may be related to their exposure to Agent Orange, the defoliant that the United States used in the Highlands during the war.

Public health screening and treatment are a regular part of refugee resettlement, and incoming health issues are usually addressed when treatable. Some arrivals need special assistance, often related to tropical parasites, and state health officials and the Center for Disease Control are involved in providing health resources.

Health insurance has been a problem for the Montagnard community. Because most Montagnards go to work quickly, they lose Medicaid eligibility, and it is difficult to find jobs with adequate health insurance in the current market. Like other low-income people, the Montagnards typically do not seek medical care except in emergencies because of the costs involved. The Montagnards do not traditionally think about disease prevention, and aggressive health education activities are needed for this population. In general, the population is cooperative and diligent when provided with health education and disease prevention information. top

## Mental Health

***In both the animist and Christian communities, mental health problems are thought of as spiritual issues.***

Mental health as conceptualized in the West is foreign to the Montagnard community. In both the animist and Christian communities, mental health problems are thought of as spiritual issues. In church communities, prayer, salvation, and the acceptance of God's will are common responses to problems. Persons with severe behavioral disorders are generally tolerated within the community though they may be shunned if they are too disruptive or appear dangerous to others. Medication provided by health providers is accepted by the community, and the Montagnards are receptive to both religious and Western medical practices.

Montagnards suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), related to war, survivor guilt, persecution, and torture. For refugees, of course, the condition is aggravated by the loss of family, homeland, culture, and traditional social support systems. For many, though not all sufferers, PTSD will fade in time as they find employment and gain self-esteem associated with self-sufficiency, the freedom to practice their religion, and community acceptance. top

## Youth

***An issue in the Montagnard community is the lack of positive role models.***

Most Montagnard children are not prepared for the U.S. school system. Most arrive with little formal education and little if any English. They often do not know how to behave or dress appropriately; few have proper school supplies. If they have attended school in Vietnam, they expect a highly

regimented authoritarian structure focusing on rote memory skills rather than on problem solving. They are unfamiliar with the great diversity found in the U.S. public school system. Almost all students would benefit significantly from tutoring and other supplemental programs, both for academic achievement and the development of social skills.

Montagnard parents are also unfamiliar with our public school system and the role of parent involvement that is expected of them. Parents are unable to help their children with homework or help them develop appropriate social behavior. Typically, children receive neither money from their parents for extracurricular activities nor the encouragement to participate in such activities. School personnel also complain that parents do not respond to notices, do not supervise their children at home, and allow their children to come to school sick.

Other issues with children emerge during the teen years. The issues are similar to those of other populations but are exaggerated in a community in which parents do not know English, do not understand American rules of behavior and methods of discipline (there is much confusion about child abuse), and do not approve of dating. As in other newcomer communities, intergenerational tensions are exacerbated when the children learn English more quickly than their parents do and become the culture brokers and interpreters for their families.

An issue in the Montagnard community is the lack of positive role models. Because the Montagnard population in the United States is small with only a brief resettlement history, the community lacks a cadre of successful Montagnards to provide guidance to young people. There are few college-educated Montagnards and few with experience and influence in mainstream social institutions. Moreover, many elders, the traditional source of guidance among the Montagnards, are preoccupied by the problems of families and communities struggling for cultural and literal survival in the Highlands. Without adult mentors within their ethnic community who can provide advice on how to deal with peer pressure and American expectations, first-generation children are easily led into trouble by their peers. Thus, American advocates, with access to resources and influence within the mainstream power structure, are key to Montagnard advancement.

The next generation of the Montagnards, the youth now growing up in the United States, will be the ones to lead the community to a new level of acculturation. Some will get sidetracked by the conflicts of youth that are especially prevalent among the first generation of newcomers. Others will follow their parents into factories and mills and become respected working-class citizens. If the right kinds of educational opportunities are provided, still others will go on to higher education and to positions of leadership in their community.

top

*Younger children* **Learning English**

***acquire oral English without great difficulty though they may suffer from limited literacy...***

Younger children acquire oral English without great difficulty though they may suffer from limited literacy since most will be living in homes where there are neither books nor the motivation to read. Older children and adults will progress more slowly in the acquisition of oral English but may make accelerated progress in written English if they are literate in their tribal language or in Vietnamese. Working adults arriving with limited English proficiency will have the greatest difficulty learning English because they will not have much time or energy to study. Typically their work environment encourages only rudimentary English unless employers develop some type of on-the-job English language training program for them. Some employers have implemented these programs to the great benefit of both management and workers.

top

## Relationships Between Early and Recent Arrivals

***Many long-term Montagnard residents have opened their homes and limited resources to the new group.***

Among the earlier arrivals, a shared history serves to strengthen community ties and overcome tensions based on different attitudes toward the resistance movement in Vietnam and toward tribal identity. Most of these refugees were affiliated in some way with the resistance army of the old FULRO movement. Thus, the established Montagnard community, while made up of a number of tribes, has a long history of working closely together.

The new population share with the previous groups a concern about the Highlands, but their experiences there are more recent, and most were not part of the old FULRO movement. There are not as many overlapping family relationships or even tribal kinships between the two groups. Sometimes there is no shared language. (In fact, *within* the 2002 group there is no single common language, and not all know each other.) The two groups are at very different stages of adjustment.

Many long-term Montagnard residents have opened their homes and limited resources to the new group. However, trust, mutual respect, and the willingness to accept different opinions must be reinforced as the earlier arrivals attempt to incorporate these frightened and unprepared newcomers into their community.

top

## The Montagnard Experience in North Carolina

The first group of Montagnard refugees were mostly men who had fought with the Americans in Vietnam, but there were a few women and children in the group as well. The refugees were resettled in Raleigh, Greensboro, and Charlotte, North Carolina, because of the number of Special Forces veterans living in the area, the supportive business climate with numerous entry-level job opportunities, and a terrain and climate similar to what the refugees had known in their home environment. To ease the impact of resettlement, the refugees were divided into three groups, roughly by tribe,

with each group resettled in one city.

Beginning in 1987, the population began to grow slowly as additional Montagnards were resettled in the state. Most arrived through family reunification and the Orderly Departure Program. Some were resettled through special initiatives, such as the program for reeducation camp detainees, developed through negotiations between the U.S. and Vietnamese governments. A few others came through a special Amerasian project that included Montagnard youth whose mothers were Montagnard and whose fathers were American.

In December 1992, a group of 402 Montagnards were found by a UN force responsible for the Cambodian border provinces of Mondolkiri and Ratanakiri. Given the choice to return to Vietnam or be interviewed for resettlement in the United States, the group chose resettlement. They were processed and resettled with very little advance notice in the three North Carolina cities. The group included 269 males, 24 females, and 80 children.

Through the 1990s, the Montagnard population in the United States continued to grow as new family members arrived and more reeducation camp detainees were released by the Vietnamese government. A few families settled in other states, notably California, Florida, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Washington, but by far North Carolina was the preferred choice for the Montagnards. By 2000, the Montagnard population in North Carolina had grown to around 3,000, with almost 2,000 in the Greensboro area, 700 in the Charlotte area, and 400 in the Raleigh area. North Carolina had become host to the largest Montagnard community outside of Vietnam.

In February 2001, Montagnards in Vientam's Central Highlands staged demonstrations relating to their freedom to worship at local Montagnard churches. The government's harsh response caused nearly 1,000 villagers to flee into Cambodia, where they sought sanctuary in the jungle highlands. The Vietnamese pursued the villagers into Cambodia, attacking them and forcing some to return to Vietnam. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees granted refugee status to the remaining villagers, most of whom did not want to be repatriated.

In the summer of 2002, close to 900 Montagnard villagers were resettled as refugees in the three North Carolina resettlement sites of Raleigh, Greensboro, and Charlotte, as well as in a new resettlement site, New Bern. The new population of Montagnards, like previous groups, is predominantly male, many of them having left wives and children behind in their haste to escape and with the expectation that they could return to their villages. A few intact families are being resettled.

How have the Montagnard newcomers fared? For the most part, those who came before 1986 adjusted quite well given their backgrounds-war injuries, a decade without health care, and little or no formal education-and given the absence of an established Montagnard community in the United States into which they could integrate. Their traditional friendliness, openness,

strong work ethic, humility, and religious beliefs have served them well in their adjustment to the United States. The Montagnards rarely complain about their conditions or problems, and their humility and stoicism have impressed many Americans.

Among those who came between 1986 and 2000, able-bodied adults found jobs within a few months and families moved toward a low-income level of self sufficiency. Montagnard language churches were formed and some people joined mainstream churches. A group of recognized Montagnard leaders, representing the three cities and various tribal groups organized a mutual assistance association, the Montagnard Dega Association to help with resettlement, maintain cultural traditions, and assist with communication.

The adjustment process has been more difficult for the 2002 arrivals. This group had relatively little overseas cultural orientation to prepare them for life in the United States, and they bring with them a great deal of confusion and fear of persecution. Many did not plan to come as refugees; some had been misled into believing that they were coming to the United States to be part of a resistance movement. Moreover, the 2002 arrivals do not have political or family ties with the existing Montagnard communities in the United States since they come from villages and tribes that were not part of the earlier resistance movement. top

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